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Two studies were conducted to test the validity of the situational interview. In the first study, a concurrent validity strategy showed that there is a correlation between what people in an interview setting say they do on the job and what they actually do on the job as reported by both peers and and supervisors. Furthermore, a situational approach to interviewing appears preferable to asking people direct questions about their past

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THE SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW:

EXAMINING WHAT PEOPLE SAY VERSUS WHAT THEY DO VERSUS WHAT THEY HAVE DONE

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THE SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW:
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Abstract

Two studies were conducted to test the validity of the situational
interview. In the first study a concurrent validity strategy showed that
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THE SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW:

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One of the most frequently documented failures in the industrial-organizational psychology literature is the inability of the selection interview to identify who is likely to perform a job in a satisfactory manner (Mayfield, 1964; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1966; Wagner, 1949). Much research time and effort was expended in the 1960's and early 1970's documenting why the interview yields disappointing results as a selection device (e.g., Hakel, Dobmeyer & Dunnette, 1970; Webster, 1964; Waxley, Yukl, Kovacs & Sanders, 1972).

Little research, however, has been done recently to improve the validity of the selection interview (Tenopyr & Oeltjen, 1982). One early study which did demonstrate the effectiveness of an interview procedure was conducted by Ghiselli (1966). This procedure involved asking interviewees specific questions about their past experiences. Using this method, Ghiselli was able to predict successfully the job tenure of stock brokers (r = .35).

Ghiselli's procedure was as follows: The interviewer was given no information about the interviewee except the person's name and the branch office for which the applicant was being considered as an employee. Each interviewee was asked what he or she had done (e.g., what college had been attended), why it had been done (e.g., why a particular branch of the military had been chosen), what duties the person had performed in various jobs, and how well the person had performed them. Finally, the applicants were asked why they wanted to become a stockbroker, what they thought about the

job, and what they thought they would derive from it.

It should be noted that questions of a personal nature were not asked.
If an interviewee volunteered information of a personal nature (e.g., rela-
tionships with parents or spouse, religious and political preferences,
childhood experiences) the individual was told that the information was not
pertinent to the interview.

In summary, Ghiselli's procedure is a method for collecting information
about a person's past experiences to predict the person's work behavior.
The only "inferential luxury" he allowed himself was based on his estimate
of what each person knew of the job opening. He hypothesized correctly that
people who know what they are "getting into" are more likely to be more
successful than people who lack this knowledge.

In a comprehensive review of the literature, Tenopyr and Oeltjen (1982)
found that one of the few interview procedures other than Ghiselli's that
successfully predicts performance is the situational interview (Latham, Saari,
Pursell & Campion, 1980). Whereas Ghiselli's method is based on a fundamental
axiom of psychology, namely, that past behaviors are among the best predictors
of future behaviors, the situational interview is based on the premise that
a person's behavior is related to his or her present goals or intentions.

The two procedures are similar in that a person's past experiences
undoubtedly affect responses to interview questions regardless of the format.
In both procedures questions of a personal nature are avoided. Finally, both
procedures incorporate implicitly the importance of a realistic job preview
(Wanous, 1980). Ghiselli's procedure ascertains the extent to which an
applicant has acquired knowledge of the job prior to the interview; Latham

et al.'s procedure provides this information to the interviewee through the questions themselves. That is, the questions are derived from a systematic job analysis, namely, the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). The questions are based directly on incidents or situations that were identified in the job analysis. The applicant is told that the situations are those that a job incumbent could expect to encounter frequently. The following two incidents should illustrate this point.

(1) Near the end of your shift you are moving through the plant to clean an area your supervisor has told you is badly in need of cleaning before you leave. As you go by, another employee calls to you, and says he needs help getting the production equipment in operation. This will not leave you enough time to finish your work. What would you do?

(2) One afternoon you are working on a project for the office manager that needs to be finished by quitting time. The Region Vice President, for whom you also do work, comes to you at 4:30 p.m. and hands you a hand-written letter that he wants you to type and get out in the mail as soon as possible. If you type this letter you will not be able to meet your deadline on the project. What would you do?

The situational interview differs from that used by Ghiselli in that rather than focusing on an applicant's past behavior, the focus is on the applicant's present goals or intentions. The applicant is asked, "What would you do if ...?" or "How would you deal with this situation?" Another characteristic of the situational interview is that a scoring key is developed to illustrate or bench mark 1 (poor), 3 (average), and 5 (excellent) answers. The bench marks are written in terms of observable behavioral

responses (e.g., 1 - "I'd stay home," 3 - "I'd phone my supervisor," 5 - "I'd come to work"). Thus interobserver reliability is facilitated. Ghiselli himself was the interviewer using his procedure. Thus, the interobserver reliability of his procedure is not known.

An advantage of Ghiselli's procedure is that the information elicited from interviewees has the potential for being verified by former employers who are willing to answer straightforward job-related questions. This is a disadvantage of the situational interview. This problem is offset by the fact that the questions are presumably sufficiently complex (as in a case study) that "good" answers are not intuitively obvious. As a result the person being interviewed states his/her actual intentions. This assumption is supported by three previous studies (Latham et al., 1980) where significant correlations were obtained between responses obtained to interview questions and behavior on the job. If the "correct answers" to the questions were transparent to the interviewees, it is likely that a restriction in range in responses to the questions would have precluded correlations that were significant. Every interviewee would have made similar, if not identical, responses to the questions.

A potential problem with Ghiselli's approach is that it may tend to discriminate against people who have not been given the opportunity to engage in certain behaviors in the past. This is less of a problem with the situational interview because of its focus solely on goals or intentions. The problem remains only to the extent that one's past experiences are so impoverished that the interviewee has no way of knowing how he or she might behave under different conditions.

In summary, it would appear an interview procedure identifying either a person's past behaviors or behavioral intentions can be a successful strategy for selection. The purpose of this paper is to report the results of two studies, each with a different objective.

The purpose of the first study is applied in nature. Here it was hypothesized that what people state they do in an interview setting correlates with what they actually do on the job as reported by supervisors and peers. In addition, the advantage of asking what people do rather than what they have done was compared.

The objective of the second study was to respond to the request of Tenopyr and Oeltjen (1982) for a replication of Study 3 by Latham et al. (1980). That study used a predictive validity design to show that a person's intentions or goals expressed in an interview setting correlate with subsequent behavior on the job.

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### Subjects

All 29 office clerical personnel in a regional office of a major wood products company participated in this study. All were females who had worked for the company an average of 6 years (SD = 4.4). The primary duties of these people include typing, filing, and responding to in-coming telephone calls.

Procedure

The study involved three major steps: (1) the development of a performance appraisal instrument; (2) the development of a selection interview consisting of 20 situational questions plus the 5 questions used by Ghiselli (1966); and (3) a concurrent validation strategy conducted by correlating interviewees' responses with supervisory, peer, and self assessments of performance on the job.

The performance appraisal instrument was developed from a systematic job analysis, namely, the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). Fifteen job incumbents and four supervisors were interviewed to obtain the critical incidents which were then categorized by the authors into behavioral observation scales (BOS; Latham & Wexley, 1981). The BOS defined nine job dimensions (e.g., technical skills; interpersonal skills; initiative/motivation). Each scale or dimension contained 5 to 14 behavioral items (e.g., can type 50-60 words per minute; focuses on problems rather than personalities; meets deadlines with no prompting). A 5-point Likert-type scale (Almost Never - Almost Always) appeared beside each behavioral item. Advantages of BOS as an appraisal tool have been described in detail elsewhere (Latham & Wexley, 1981).

The situational interview was developed by deriving 20 questions from the critical incidents obtained in the job analysis. For example, the following question was developed from an incident that had been categorized under the dimension "Initiative/Motivation":

"For the past week you have been consistently getting the jobs that are the most time consuming (e.g., poor handwriting, complex statistical work). You know it's nobody's fault because you have

been simply taking the jobs in priority order. You have just

picked up your fourth job of the day and it's another loser.

What would you do?"

In addition to the 20 situational questions, the 5 questions developed

by Ghiselli (1966) were included in the situational interview. The 5 Ghiselli

questions are listed below:

(1) What have you done in the past in terms of experience and/or formal

training that is relevant to this job?

(2) Why did you do it?

(3) What were your activities?

(4) How well did you do it?

(5) Why did you want this job?

For each of the 25 interview questions (20 situational, 5 Ghiselli), stan-

dardized bench-marked answers (1 = poor, 3 = average, 5 = excellent) were devel-

oped by the supervisors of the office clerical employees. This was done to

facilitate objective scoring of the responses by the present authors who had

been asked by the company to conduct the interviews. For example, the bench

mark answers for the preceding situational interview question are: 1 = Thumb

through the pile and take another job; 3 = Complain to the coordinator, but do

the job; 5 = Take the job without complaining and do it. Also, as an example,

the benchmarks for the Ghiselli question, "What have you done in the past in

terms of experience and/or formal training that is relevant to this job?" are:

1 = Not much, but enjoy working with people; 3 = Work experience only, or

education only; 5 = Formal training beyond high school and relevant work exper-

ience.

Following the development of the selection interview, each of the 29 office clerical people was interviewed by one of the authors. The responses were correlated with the BOS completed by supervisors, peers, and the job incumbents themselves.

For each of the 29 employees, the BOS were completed by (1) her supervisor, (2) 3 to 5 peers, and (3) the employee herself. Supervisory appraisals were collected because this is the normative practice in this organization. Peer appraisals were collected because they can provide a stable valid measure relatively free of the biases and idiosyncrasies of a single rater (Latham & Wexley, 1981).

Self appraisals were collected despite the fact that such appraisals may lead to inflated ratings. However, no studies have used self ratings with BOS. Downs, Farr and Colbeck (1978) found that when the self appraisal "is confined to essentially behavioural tests which take place within the visual field of the testee ..., i.e., the testee is visually able to observe her own performance" (Downs et al., 1978, p. 276), self appraisals can be valid.

The self and peer ratings were obtained in meetings with groups of 9 to 12 office staff personnel. They rated themselves and 3 to 5 co-workers whose names appeared on a list given to each individual. The peer ratings lists were compiled by randomly selecting individuals who had frequent job contact with one another.

The supervisory ratings were made by each person's immediate supervisor at the same time that the self and peer ratings were being obtained. In total, there were four supervisors who made the ratings. Everyone (supervisors, job incumbents) received a training course (Latham, Wexley & Pursell,

1975; Pursell, Dossett & Latham, 1980) to help them minimize making rating errors when evaluating others. The evaluations were made at approximately the same time the interviews were conducted. No one had any knowledge of the scores these people obtained in their interview when completing the BOS.

A concurrent validity model was used for four reasons. First, a predictive validity model was not possible due to the small number of job openings that occur in this organization on a yearly basis. Second, the American Psychological Association, Division of Industrial-Organizational Psychology (1981) Principles for Selection Procedures state explicitly that concurrent studies provide useful estimates of validity. Barrett, Phillips and Alexander (1981) have shown that not only has the conceptual distinction between predictive and concurrent validity been exaggerated, but more importantly, "the differences that may exist have never been shown to render concurrent validity inaccurate as an estimate of predictive validity... these differences, if present, have a minimal impact on the magnitude of an obtained validity coefficient" (Barrett et al., 1981, p. 1). Although Barrett's work was restricted to cognitive tests, previous work using the situational interview showed that partialling out experience did not affect the magnitude of the correlation coefficient (Latham et al., 1980). Finally, and most importantly, this study was applied in nature. We were not interested in showing unidirectional causality, namely, that intentions affect behavior. The sole purpose of this study was to determine whether a relationship exists between what is said in an interview and what is done on the job. Such a relationship, if it exists, would be of major importance to employers regardless of assumptions of causality. In this respect the study is interactional

in nature (Terborg, 1931) in that it recognizes that behavior is the function of a continuous process of the multidirectional interaction between the individual and the situation encountered.

### Results

The means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies of the Ghiselli questions, situational interview and BOS completed by supervisors, peers, and job incumbents are shown in Table 1. The intercorrelations among the rater groups are shown in Table 2. The supervisory and peer ratings correlated significantly with one another.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.
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The correlation between the Ghiselli items and the situational interview was .15 (n.s.). The correlation between each interview procedure and the BOS is shown in Table 3, along with Multiple R values. Only the situational interview correlated significantly with supervisory, peer, and self ratings of job performance. Ghiselli's procedure correlated significantly only with self ratings of performance. When job experience was partialled out, none of the correlations changed significantly.

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Insert Table 3 about here.
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In order to further examine the relative contributions of the situational interview and the Ghiselli questions, multiple regression equations were calculated using a hierarchical method. When the situational interview responses were entered first into a multiple regression equation, followed by the responses to Ghiselli's questions, the amount of variance accounted for in each of the dependent variables (supervisory, peer, and self ratings) did not increase significantly over that accounted for by the situational interview alone. However, when the reverse was done, the increase in the amount of variance accounted for by the situational interview was signifi-

cant (p < .05) for each of the dependent variables.

## Discussion

The significance of this study is threefold. First, the results of the situational interview show that there is a relationship between goals or intentions expressed in an interview and behavior on the job. That goals correlate with behavior is among the most robust findings in the psychological literature on motivation (Locke, Shaw, Saari & Latham, 1981). This is the fourth time this finding has been found to be applicable to the selection literature. Latham et al. (1980) found support for intentions corresponding to behavior with two groups of entry level employees as well as first-line supervisors. Job experience was not found to moderate this relationship. The present study has replicated these findings with clerical employees.

Second, significant correlations with performance measures were obtained in this and the three previous interview studies (Latham et al., 1980) despite the use of small sample sizes (i.e., 49, 63, 56, and 29, respectively). We believe that these outcomes occurred by adhering to Wernimont and Campbell's (1968) plea to develop predictors that are not only realistic samples of behavior, but are as similar to the criteria as possible. In these studies the performance criteria consist of observable behaviors derived from a job analysis. The interview questions are derived from the same job analysis. The interview questions tap behavioral intentions.

Third, and the major finding of the study, was that the situational interview was found to better correspond to job performance than Ghiselli's

interview which assesses past experiences. This is encouraging from the
standpoint of affirmative action policies whereby an emphasis on a person's
past could lead to selection decisions that adversely impact certain groups
of people. Previous studies have shown that the situational interview can
predict the job performance of both females and blacks (Latham et al.,
1980).

## STUDY 2

A limitation of Study 1 and two of the three studies that preceded it
(Latham et al., 1980) is the use of a concurrent validity design. The
design precludes assumptions regarding unidirectional causality. The
theoretical rationale of the situational interview is that a person's goals
or intentions predict subsequent behavior on the job. Thus from a theoreti-
cal standpoint, a predictive validity strategy must be used. Only one of the
three studies conducted previously by Latham et al. used a predictive valid-
ity design, and that, because of its small sample size, needs replication
(Tenopyr & Oeltjen, 1982).

A potential limitation of the first study reported here is the poten-
tial problem of lack of independence among the various sources of data and
instrument development. Job incumbents were the source of critical inci-
dents, peer ratings and self ratings as well as statements of behavioral
intentions.

From a rational standpoint this issue was not a problem. No more than
five incidents were collected from one individual. It is unlikely that these
five incidents would provide a comprehensive description of the behavioral
domain of this one individual. The appraisal instrument was based on a

composite of the collected incidents. Nevertheless, a predictive validity study would provide empirical data regarding both issues: causality and independence of measures. Thus the following study was conducted.

## Method

### Sample

Entry level utility people (n = 349) were recruited for work in a newsprint mill. The mill was being started up for the first time. The applicants were recruited from across the United States. Of the 349 people interviewed, 157 were hired. The mean age of the two groups was 29.76 (SD = 7.56) and 26.51 (SD = 6.82), respectively.

### Procedure

Hiring decisions were based primarily on recommendations and the mill manager's knowledge of the applicant's reputation in the industry. Thus an opportunity was available to conduct a predictive validity study using the situational interview.

The interview and bench marks were developed by the company's personnel department and line superintendents independently of the authors. The interview consisted of 21 questions. The interview was conducted by two to three people (at least one superintendent and one person from personnel). The interview answers were scored independently by the interviewers. Upon completing the scoring, discussion was held until consensus was reached on an overall score for the applicant.

Three years later, the present authors were asked to develop BOS for appraisal purposes. The five job dimensions were safety, work habits, job

knowledge and ability, interactions with peers, and interactions with supervisor.

First line supervisors received training (Latham et al., 1975; Pursell et al., 1980) on objectivity/accuracy in making appraisals. None of these people, including the authors, had knowledge of a job incumbent's score on the situational interview three years earlier. The first line supervisors completed the BOS on the utility people.

## Results

Table 4 shows the internal consistency and the intercorrelations among the BOS measures. Table 5 shows the mean BOS scores using a 0 - 4 point scale. The applicants (n = 349) performed no differently on the situational interview ($\bar{X}$ = 80.02, SD = 12.17) than did the people who were subsequently hired (n = 157, $\bar{X}$ = 81.25, SD = 12.56).

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Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here.

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The correlation between performance in the interview and subsequent performance on the job was significant (p < .05) as assessed by the composite BOS (r = .14).

## Discussion

This study is the fifth in a series of investigations to determine whether there is a relationship between what is said in the interview and what is done on the job. Two studies including the present one have shown that intentions affect behavior. This is not to deny that subsequent behavior can and will affect future intentions. It simply shows that present intentions do in fact predict subsequent behavior. Thus study 3 of Latham et al. (1980) has been replicated.

A factor unique to the fifth study is that the situational interview was developed and conducted independently of the authors by the sponsoring company. That the correlation is primarily of theoretical significance only is a function of the high quality workforce. Consequently there was a severe restriction of range in the performance appraisal scores. This is because an attempt had been made to identify, on the basis of reputation in the industry, the very best people and then to recruit them. That the effort was successful is evident by the number of people who have been terminated -- two.

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TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Consistencies
of Ghiselli Interview, Situational Interview
and Performance Measures
(N = 29)

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ghiselli interview | 19.27 | 3.48 | .55 |
| Situational interview | 72.89 | 9.11 | .73 |
| Supervisor ratings | 253.67 | 28.59 | .96 |
| Peer ratings | 256.40 | 25.03 | .96 |
| Self ratings | 266.18 | 15.07 | .88 |

## TABLE 2

### Intercorrelations of Supervisor, Peer and Self Ratings
### Using Behavioral Observation Scales
### (N = 29)

|            | Self | Supervisor |
|------------|------|------------|
| Supervisor | .29  | ---        |
| Peer       | .12  | .42*       |

*p < .05

TABLE 3

Validity of Situational Interview Versus Ghiselli Items
with Supervisor, Self, and Peer Ratings
(N = 29)

|  | Supervisor | Peer | Self |
|---|---|---|---|
| Situational Interview | .39* | .42* | .50** |
| Ghiselli Items | .14 | .15 | .40* |
| Multiple R | .40 | .43 | .60** |

*p < .05

**p < .01

## TABLE 4

### The Internal Consistency of the Performance (BOS) Measures

| Category | Reliability (alpha) | Intercorrelations | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Safety | .84 | | | | | |
| 2. Work habits | .89 | .61 | | | | |
| 3. Job knowledge and ability | .84 | .58 | .61 | | | |
| 4. Interactions with peers | .91 | .50 | .69 | .45 | | |
| 5. Interactions with supervisor | .82 | .53 | .77 | .66 | .66 | |
| 6. Composite | .86 | .73 | .88 | .79 | .81 | .91 |

## TABLE 5

Criterion Statistics for BOS Group

| | Criterion | $\bar{X}$ | SD | n |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BOS 1 | Safety | 3.56 | .30 | 167 |
| BOS 2 | Work Habits | 3.60 | .36 | 167 |
| BOS 3 | Job Knowledge | 3.39 | .49 | 167 |
| BOS 4 | Peer Interactions | 3.50 | .54 | 167 |
| BOS 5 | Interactions with Supervisor | 3.22 | .66 | 166 |
| BOSTCT | Composite | 3.46 | .40 | 167 |

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